LHVT-Scranton-History

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THE TERRITORY OF SCRANTON

IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO THE LACKAWANNA IRON AND COAL CO. PURCHASE.

By Edward Merrifield.

[Historical Notes, No. 4.]

The intention of this sketch is to describe the condition of affairs in the territory which comprises the city of Scranton, just at and immediately prior to the time when what is now known as the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company commenced operations; prefacing, however, with a brief historical account leading up to that time.

Originally this section was included in the Connecticut reservation known as Westmoreland, Litchfield County. About 1773, Providence township was organized. A conflict as to jurisdiction existed between Pennsylvania and Connecticut, which was finally settled in 1782, by what is known as the Decree of Trenton, recognizing the claims of Pennsylvania. Shortly after, Providence township was organized as a part of Northumberland County. In 1786 Luzerne County was set off from Northumberland, Providence remaining a part of said Luzerne until it became extinct by a portion being attached to Lackawanna and the creation of the Borough of Providence, March 14, 1849; the Borough of Hyde Park, May 14, 1852; the Borough of Scranton, February 14, 1856; the Borough of Dunmore, April 10, 1862; and finally the merging of the Boroughs of Providence, Hyde Park, and Scranton, and the remaining portion of the township, into the City of Scranton, by act of the Legislature of April 23, 1866.

The first white settler upon this territory was Isaac Tripp, who came in 1771, building a log house on the flats east of

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the residence of the late Col. Ira Tripp, on North Main Street. Philip Abbott, who had purchased the tract upon which are built the iron works and the principal part of the business houses of the city, came in 1788, establishing himself near the old Slocum residence on the banks of the Roaring Brook, and not far in rear of The Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company's Steel Mill. Ebenezer Slocum subsequently became the purchaser of the Abbott property, settling upon it in 1798, where he lived until his death in 1832. He was the first to establish iron works in this locality, attempting to make iron from the native ores. It did not prove a success. Here in 1816 was established the first post-office, called Unionville, and Benjamin Slocum was appointed postmaster. In 1819 it was moved to the village of Providence with John Vaughn as postmaster. A post-office was established at Hyde Park, July 14, 1832, and William Merrifield appointed postmaster. In 1850, in the portion which had been known as Unionville, then Slocum Hollow, subsequently Harrison, a post-office was established under the latter name, with John W. Moore as postmaster. The name was subsequently changed to Scrantonia, afterward Scranton, and thus the territory remained with three post-offices, even after the city was inaugurated. The first settler in Providence village was Enoch Holmes, and here it was that the first church was erected. It was blown down before completion by the great hurricane, which on the evening of July 3, 1834, nearly destroyed the hamlet. The church was not rebuilt. The first settlement in Hyde Park was in 1790 by a Mr. Lindley making a clearing, and building near the corner of Washburn and Main Streets. A Mr. Dolph followed shortly after, settling on the opposite side of the street. Elder William Bishop came later, and built a log house on the same spot where now stands the Merrifield homestead, just above the Masonic Hall. He was a Baptist, and the pioneer preacher. The projector of the village, however, was Philip Heermans, at whose instigation his brother-in-law, Joseph Fellows, then residing at Albany, was induced to lay out and sell lots, three-fourths of an acre in size.

Long prior, and at the time the white settlers first began

to come, there was an Indian village called Capouse, named after the chief who was of the tribe of Monseys. It was located on the flats east of the Diamond coal-breaker. Until within about thirty years an old Indian apple-tree, great in its proportions, stood there to mark the locality. It is designated among the records as the first place for holding town meetings for the township of Providence. In 1813 the place for holding township and general elections was fixed at the house of Stephen Tripp, on Main Street, at the summit of the hill above Hyde Park. This was the first public house for entertainment.

The settlers were as a rule engaged in clearing up the land and farming, hence the growth in population was slow, and nothing of particular note occurred until the advent of the projectors of the Lackawanna Iron and Coal Company. The attention of William Henry, of Stroudsburg, a geologist, and man of scientific attainments, was called to this region. He succeeded in securing the aid of capitalists, and in 1838 commenced negotiations with William Ricketson, William Merrifield, and Zeno Albro, who were the joint owners of the tract upon which the Iron Company subsequently commenced operations. On account of the death of Edward Armstrong, the principal man, the arrangements fell through. Mr. Henry subsequently induced George W. Scranton, S. T. Scranton, and Sanford Grant to complete the purchase, and on the 20th day of September, 1840, as Scrantons & Grant, they commenced the erection of the blast-furnace. This was the dawn of a new era for this section, and the beginning of its development. As stated in the outset, it is now proposed to describe the condition of affairs within the territorial limits of the city at that time.

There were four roads running up and down the valley. On the Hyde Park side there was what was known then, as now, as the Back Road, located about as it is at present. Then came Main Street, which has not been materially changed. On the easterly side of the Lackawanna, the street commencing from the direction of Throop, and running on through Sanderson Avenue, thence into Penn until passing the Dickson Works, was practically the same. From there it

went diagonally across to the neighborhood of the Wyoming House, thence down to the grist-mill, and past the old Slocum residence, crossing the Roaring Brook just below the present bridge into Cedar Street, which it traversed very nearly. The other street was called the Dunmore road, the upper part of which has not been materially changed. From the neighborhood of the Moses Taylor Hospital it came diagonally down past where the blast-furnace stands, intersecting the road just previously described near the Slocum residence. Running easterly and westerly was, first, Luzerne Street, substantially the same as now until crossing the Lackawanna, from which it ran across the flats, winding along under the hill until it intersected the north and south road near the Slocum place. Jackson Street, on the Hyde Park side, was about as it is now. After crossing the Lackawanna bridge the street went directly up the hill, thence in a zigzag direction towards Lackawanna Avenue, and occupying nearly the same ground until the intersection with the road leading to the old grist-mill. Northerly there was the Drinker turnpike coming from the direction of Abington through Providence, now called Market Street, which still remains about as it was. Another street branching off from North Main above Providence, leading through Capouse, has not been changed. The street running from Providence diagonally across the Tripp flats and through the Pine Brook section was not opened until several years after. The Lackawanna was spanned by two covered bridges, one at the foot of Luzerne Street, and the other at Capouse; and by two open bridges, one at the foot of Jackson and the other at Market Street, Providence.

Along the back road the land was fairly well cleared up, there being a belt of forest toward the lower and one near the upper end. All along Keyser Creek it was densely wooded, a considerable portion being swamp-land. The creek abounded with speckled trout. The ridge back of Hyde Park, from one end of the city to the other, was almost entirely forest. In the vicinity of Main Avenue, on each side, the land was principally cleared. The banks of the Lackawanna were mostly wooded, especially the easterly side. About Providence it was fairly well cleared in each

direction. There was more of the native forest standing in the seventh, eighth, ninth, eleventh, twelfth, seventeenth, nineteenth, and twentieth wards, than in any other section of the city.

Commencing on the street below the Roaring Brook bridge was the farm of Joseph Slocum, where he resided. He was the son of Ebenezer Slocum, heretofore referred to as a pioneer, and lived to a great age, having died within a few years. The next was the old Slocum residence on the hill north of the bridge, then occupied by Samuel Slocum. There was a good-sized farm attached. On the bank of the brook was the stone grist-mill, and opposite lived Barton Mott, the miller. On the hill northerly from the mill and across the street was a small schoolhouse. Following the street towards Hyde Park was a five or ten-acre clearing in the neighborhood of Wyoming and Lackawanna Avenues. Up the brook a short distance from the grist-mill was the Slocum saw-mill.

On the road leading to Dunmore were the residence and farm of Elisha Hitchcock. The house was in close proximity to the corner of Monroe Avenue and Linden Street. His clearing extended down a little below the corner of Washington and Mulberry. All that section where the Court House stands, extending westerly as far as Wyoming Avenue, and on the south near the Wyoming House, was a swamp covered mostly by spruce and tamarack trees. About where the Young Men's Christian Association building stands was a good-sized pond, which afforded to the lovers of skating a place of recreation for many years after.

Going back to the Dunmore road, the first place above Hitchcock's on the easterly side of the street belonged to Jacob Fike, a German, and above him was Samuel Hornbaker ; while on the other side of the road was Joseph Carey, each having a small clearing. Over beyond the hill towards Roaring Brook lived Baltzer Swartz.

On the road leading through Green Ridge, the first place reached was the farm of Miner Carey. The house was on the left-hand side of the street, on the same spot now occupied by the house of the late Simon Ward, who performed

the first labor towards the erection of the Iron and Coal Company furnace. Next beyond and on the opposite side lived Frank Frazier, a gunmaker and repairer. A little further on was Philander Howard; and on the opposite side of the road lived Michael Lutz. The Dings farm came next, it being the place subsequently purchased by Henry Whaling, afterwards by the late George Sanderson, the originator of the Green Ridge enterprise. The house was near the place now occupied by the Sanderson homestead. On the same side of the street just beyond lived Thomas and Zeno Albro.

The next place was on the westerly corner of Market Street and Green Ridge Avenue, then known as Griffin's corners, where lived that substantial old farmer, Joshua Griffin. Diagonally across and some distance up in the lot was Philip Swartz, and above him in the direction of Dunmore was John Besecker. Above the corners on the road towards Olyphant was Jacob Besecker; next John Mills. On the same side of the street and quite a distance back was Charles Wedeman. Philip and Zophar Mead lived near the road. Back quite a distance was Peter Moore, and then came Thomas Griffin, Jr., and the last within the city limits, Philo Griffin. Daniel Bowman's place was on the westerly side of the street, near the intersection of the Capouse road.

From Griffin's corners towards Providence on the right-hand side and standing on the knoll was a school-house. Right opposite lived John G. Finch, shoemaker. Jacob Myers lived under the hill near the bridge. Across the bridge stood the grist-mill as now. A short distance west of the mill lived John Drake, the miller. On the side of the hill near the summit was John Vaughn, then one of the Justices of the Peace for Providence township. In the same house lived Mr. Williams, with whom Sweet Gardner was a boarder.

This brings us to the corners. The village was usually called at that time Razorville. On the southerly corner of Market and Main Streets was the store and residence of Alexander Jeffries. Opposite on the easterly corner was the widow Betsy Griffin's place, the front room of which was occupied by Mrs. R. H. Lackey as a millinery store. On the northerly

corner was the tavern of Nathaniel Cottrell, now known as the Bristol House. Westerly and opposite was Cottrell's store, managed by Charles T. Atwater. In part of the same building lived Robert Higgs, tailor. Pursuing the old turnpike westerly and first above the tavern was the home of Esquire Elisha S. Potter. Next above was the tailor-shop and residence of Asa Corson. Then came the old red house, which is still standing, and where Atwater lived and with whom I think Maria Snyder, his sister-in-law, made it her home. Nearly opposite was Solomon Newton. On the hill and where is now the home of the late W. W. Winton, lived a Mr. Prosser. Mr. Griffin lived next above on the opposite side. Quite a distance beyond on the westerly side of the street was Ebenezer Leach, tanner and currier. His establishment was nearly opposite. Next above and on the corner of Market and the Back Road, lived Aaron Gregory, and above him Jacob Silkman. From Gregory's corner on the Back Road leading down through what was then called the Briggs Settlement, lived the following farmers in the order stated: William Lockwood, Stephen Wheeler, and Tobias Kilmer. Mrs. Lydia Brown and family were quite a distance easterly towards Tripp's. Going back to the road, came Ira Townsend, Samuel Church, Thomas Moat and his father-in-law Nathan Roberts, Job Briggs, Tanner Briggs, Abner Briggs, Peleg Briggs, Jeremiah Briggs; then at the intersection of Jackson Street came Isaac Gray, next Martin Washburn, Alva Allis, and across the way Benjamin Corbin the carpenter. On the opposite side was a school-house. Next Elijah Luckey, and last Daniel Dodge, where the southwesterly city line is reached.

Going back to the upper end of the city, traversing Main street, on the right-hand side was Ephraim Stevens, then Samuel, and next William Stevens. John McDonald followed, then Mrs. Hutchins. Opposite lived Samuel Ward, woodturner; then came Spencer's saw-mill and grist-mill. Peter Bond had been the miller there, but whether just at that time is in doubt. Edward Spencer and his brother Calvin lived nearly opposite.

We then come to the road leading to Capouse, where

Artemus Miller carried on the business of wool-carding and making cloth. Jerison White lived there and was just about completing an axe-factory. Coming back to Main Street, the first place reached was that of Henry Heermans. Besides conducting a farm he had a store of general merchandise, and Sylvanus Heermans, a noted politician of those days, was the clerk. Next below was Aretus Heermans, and nearly opposite was the Bell school-house. Col. Ira Tripp was the next resident. Below and on the same side was a dwelling-house, occupant not recollected, and next the cabinet-shop of Newton & Bennett, which brings us to the Cottrell travern. On the other side of the street and below the Bell school-house was John Kinney. Next and almost at the corner was Williams' blacksmith-shop, then the corner occupants heretofore referred to. Passing the Cottrell store, on the westerly corner we come to the tavern of Jacob R. Bloom. Across the way was a wagon-shop and the residence of R. H. Lackey. On below was Charles H. Silkman's law-office. Crossing the street and below Bloom's tavern was a log house occupied by Harvey Chase. Next came John Stewart, shoemaker, then the Vanstork homestead, occupied by William Vanstork and brothers. Ferdinand Vanstork came next. Nearly opposite and about where Bright's wagon manufactory now stands, was built during the summer of 1840, one of the famous log cabins incident to the spirited political campaign of that year. The next place below and on the right-hand side of the road, was the residence and office of Dr. Silas B. Robinson, the only physician in this section at that time. Dr. Benjamin H. Throop came and opened an office in Providence in October. Next came Thomas Griffin, one of the noted farmers of that period; below him Philip C. Griffin. Then came the Tripp homestead, which still stands a monument to the enterprise of its founder, Isaac Tripp, senior. It was built in 1825, and with the exception of the porches and recent modern improvements, remains about as originally erected. It was occupied at that time by Isaac Tripp, now residing in Kingston, Luzerne County, brother of Ira. Next came Benjamin Tripp. Next below and on the hill were Stephen Tripp and his three sons, Samuel, N. W. and William H. The house still remains.

Next and close by the glen lived Charles H. Silkman, the only lawyer at that time. Down the ravine a short distance was the Holden Tripp residence, then occupied by William Silkman.

Returning to Main Street, the next place on the right was that of W. W. Winton. Then came Samuel Depuy on the left, then John Launch; next Talman Corbin. William Merrifield's store and residence, then Robert Merrifield came next, the buildings still remaining. Nearly opposite was the residence of Alva Heermans, Justice of the Peace, then came the Hyde Park school-house. Below lived William Engler the wagon-maker, then came his shop, and opposite, the noted yellow tavern, recently owned by Thomas Briggs, where all the balls of that period were held. It was kept by Frederick Hubbell, with whom John Sherman and family lived. Diagonally across the street was Corbin's cabinet-shop. Next J. A. Atherton, shoemaker; then Mrs. P. Hotchkiss, with whom lived her daughter and son-in-law William Ricketson. Opposite was the blacksmith-shop of Orr & Decker. Next the Charles M. Orr place, then George Decker and Abel S. Cosier. Opposite and on the corner of Main and Jackson was the old white tavern, kept by N. D. Green. On the westerly corner was the Heermans blacksmith-shop. In the next house lived John Heermans; next Harmon B. Dailey, cooper, and then Calvin Washburn. Opposite was Z. R. Knapp. The only church building in the territory was next, standing on the corner of Main and Division Streets. One of the original log school-houses, in a dilapidated condition and not in use, was on the other corner. A little below to the left lived Henry Fellows. Next came the store and residence of David Benedict, situate on the corner of Main and Luzerne Streets. Edrick Davis lived on the opposite corner, and a short distance below was Benjamin and Joseph Turvey Fellows, father and son. The next place was that of Sylvester and Lester Bristol, manufacturers of grain-cradles. On the opposite side was Henry Knapp, and the last within the city limits was Joseph Griffin.

Returning to Luzerne Street and going east, Thaddeus B.

Newton had a small store near the corners. Nearly half a mile beyond was John Fellows, father of our recent mayor. Next was the widow of Benjamin Slocum ; and not far from the bridge lived Thomas Nichols, coal-miner. On the same street, west of Main, were William Atwill, Thomas Taylor, and Dan Pepper. The latter lived near the creek and had a saw-mill opposite. West from Main on Jackson Street, the first resident on the right was Thorn Griffin, opposite Jonas Knickerbacker. On the side hill above was Milton Knickerbacker. On the hill to the right, James Kilmer. On the left-hand side beyond lived Elder William K. Mott. Next came Andrew Winton, and at the foot of the Boon Hill was John Boon, from whom the hill took its name. East of Main on the same street there was but one place, and that the farm of Sylvanus Fellows, whose house stood at the foot of the hill.

This completes the list of families and counts up about one hundred and thirty. There were a few persons who were not housekeepers, all of whom it would be impossible to enumerate. Among them, however, were Luke Flood, who mined most of the coal about Providence, and Jacob Teeter, butcher. Whether Henry Reichard was here at that time I have not been able to determine. There were others prominently identified with this section, so much so that they ought to be named herein, but who lived outside the present city limits. Among them Hon. A. B. Dunning and Chas. W. Potter.

Estimating according to the usual rule for agricultural communities, this would indicate a population of six hundred and fifty. There were sixty-one farms, forty-two of which were on the west side of the river. The land, especially on the west side, was very productive, it not being unusual to note a yield at the rate of six hundred bushels of potatoes per acre, thirty bushels of wheat, and eighty of shelled corn. The market was partly at Pittston, then the head of the North Branch Canal, but principally at Carbondale, the seat of the coal-mining operations of The Delaware & Hudson Canal Company.

There was some wild game, but it was not abundant as is

generally supposed. Neither did the Lackawanna teem with brook-trout. Suckers, chubs, catfish, and eels were rather plentiful. The homes of the speckled beauties were Leggett's and Keyser's Creeks, and Roaring Brook, where the follower of Isaac Walton found abundance to gratify his ambition, and boys could catch them on a pin-hook.

The manufacturing interests were represented by four shoe-making, three blacksmith, three wagon-making, and one cooper-shop, one axe-factory, one grain-cradle and two cabinet-making factories, one fulling-mill, one gun-making and repairing shop, one for wood-turning, and two for tailoring, four saw-mills, three grist-mills, and one tanning and currying establishment.

Coal was mined and sold for domestic use by William Merrifield from the side of the Hyde Park hill, back of the Baptist Church, by Tripps near the Diamond mines, and by Vanstorks on their place near Providence. While the people understood the importance of the coal deposit, it gave the land no appreciable value, because there was no way of getting it to market.

The selling-price of improved land was from fifteen to twenty-five dollars per acre.

There were six stores for general merchandise and one millinery shop. Merchants as a rule bought goods in New York which were shipped by the Hudson River to Rondout, thence by the Delaware & Hudson Canal and Gravity railroad to Carbondale, and from there hauled down in wagons. From Philadelphia they came by way of the North Branch Canal to Pittston.

There was a line of two-horse coaches running through the valley between Wilkes-Barre and Carbondale, going up one day and down the next. The principal route to New York was by way of Carbondale, thence to Newburg and down the Hudson River. It took nearly three days to get to the city. To Philadelphia the route was by way of Wilkes-Barre, thence to Easton and Philadelphia, all the way by stage. This gave to the inhabitants a tri-weekly mail from each direction. It is instructive to note that letter-postage at that time was graduated according to distance. The least

was sixpence, then one shilling, and then one shilling and sixpence, and so on.

There were four licensed hotels, all doing a fair business, especially the Cottrell stand, as it occupied a convenient place for travelers going by way of the Drinker turnpike ; also the old white tavern at Hyde Park, which was central between Carbondale and Wilkes-Barre, and the dinner-station for the stage travelers.

The educational interests had not been neglected. There were five school-houses ; the one at Hyde Park and one at Providence being kept open the greater portion of the year, but part of the time by private subscription. The male teachers received about eighteen dollars per month, and boarded around among the patrons of the school. Nevertheless it commanded fair talent ; indeed, there was no difficulty for any person desiring it, to become well versed in the common English branches. Among the educational features was "The Providence Union Library" with a goodly number of valuable historical and scientific works, and with headquarters at Hyde Park. Connected with it was a debating society which was faithfully kept up during the winter months. It is a singular circumstance that, from the beginning of the material prosperity of the valley, the interest in the library began to languish, and it finally collapsed.

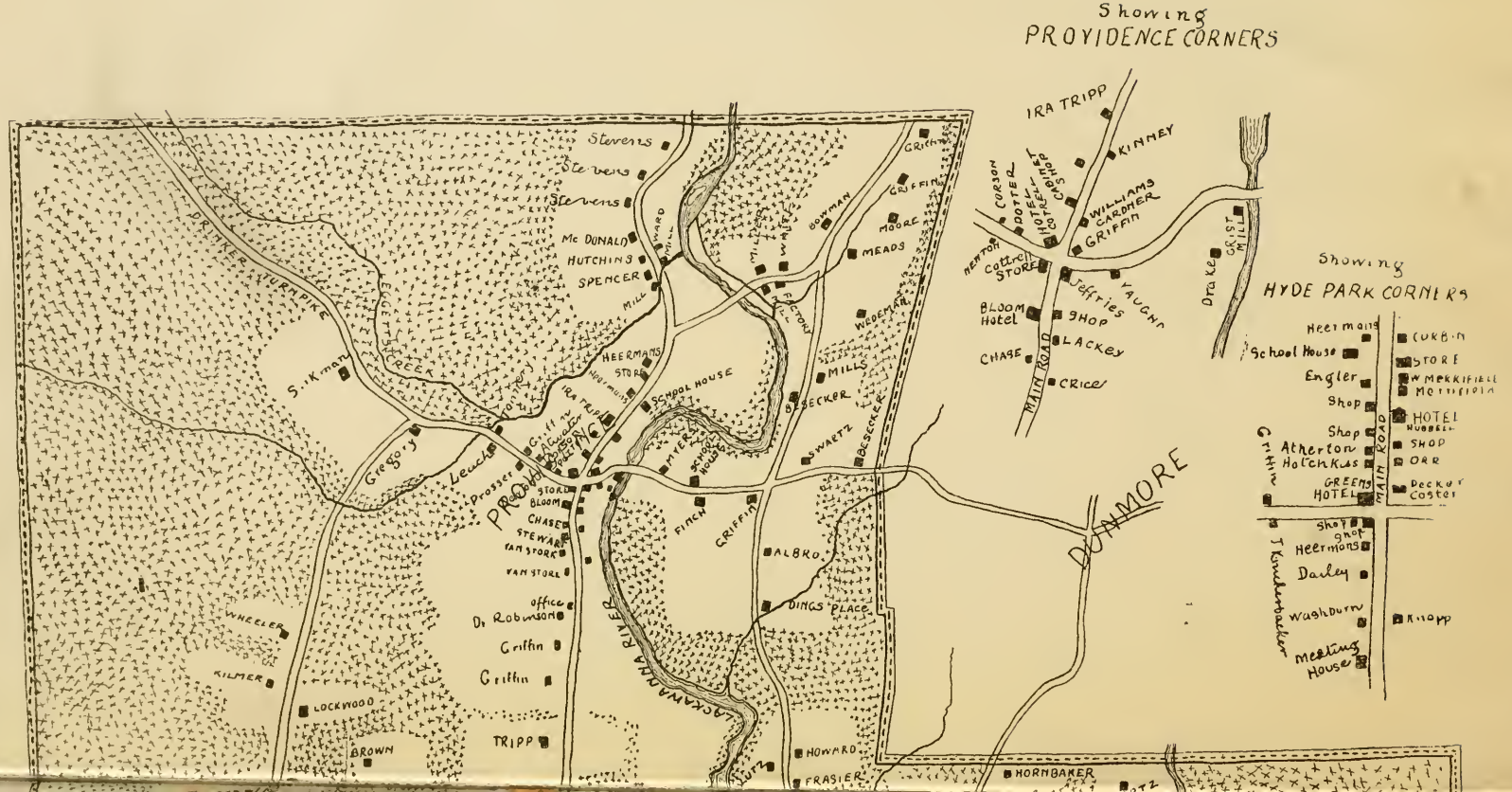
There was but one church building. That was erected by the sect called Christians, but when not occupied by them was used by other denominations. It stood on the corner of Main and Division Streets, Hyde Park. The school-houses were utilized for religious services, and scarcely a Sunday passed but that meetings were held in one or more. In the Methodist denomination the district was in the Pittston circuit, and Rev. P. G. White was the minister. Rev. Mr. Ellis succeeded him, and moved into the old Holden Tripp residence in October, 1840. Alva Heermans, an exhorter among the Christians, preached occasionally, as did Rev. Nathan Roberts, who lived over in the Briggs Settlement. The stand-by, however, was Elder William K. Mott, that faithful and devoted Baptist minister, who, besides holding

regular Sunday services at the Hyde Park church, had quite a circuit in the surrounding townships.

Of those heads of families named herein there are but four left who still reside in the city : Jacob R. Bloom, William Vanstork, of Providence, George Decker, of Hyde Park, and Balzer Swartz. Of their immediate descendants (children, I mean), there are about fifty.

These were the people and such their surroundings fifty-five years ago. They had plenty to live upon, but knew nothing of luxurious living. If money was scarce, their wants were few. Neighbors met during the winter evenings around the big open fire-places of those days, their spirits as exuberant and their faces just as cheery as though the occupants of palaces. Who can say that they were not as happy, even their enjoyment not greater, than those who now find themselves in their places in the midst of a big city ?

October, 1895.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YAUGHN
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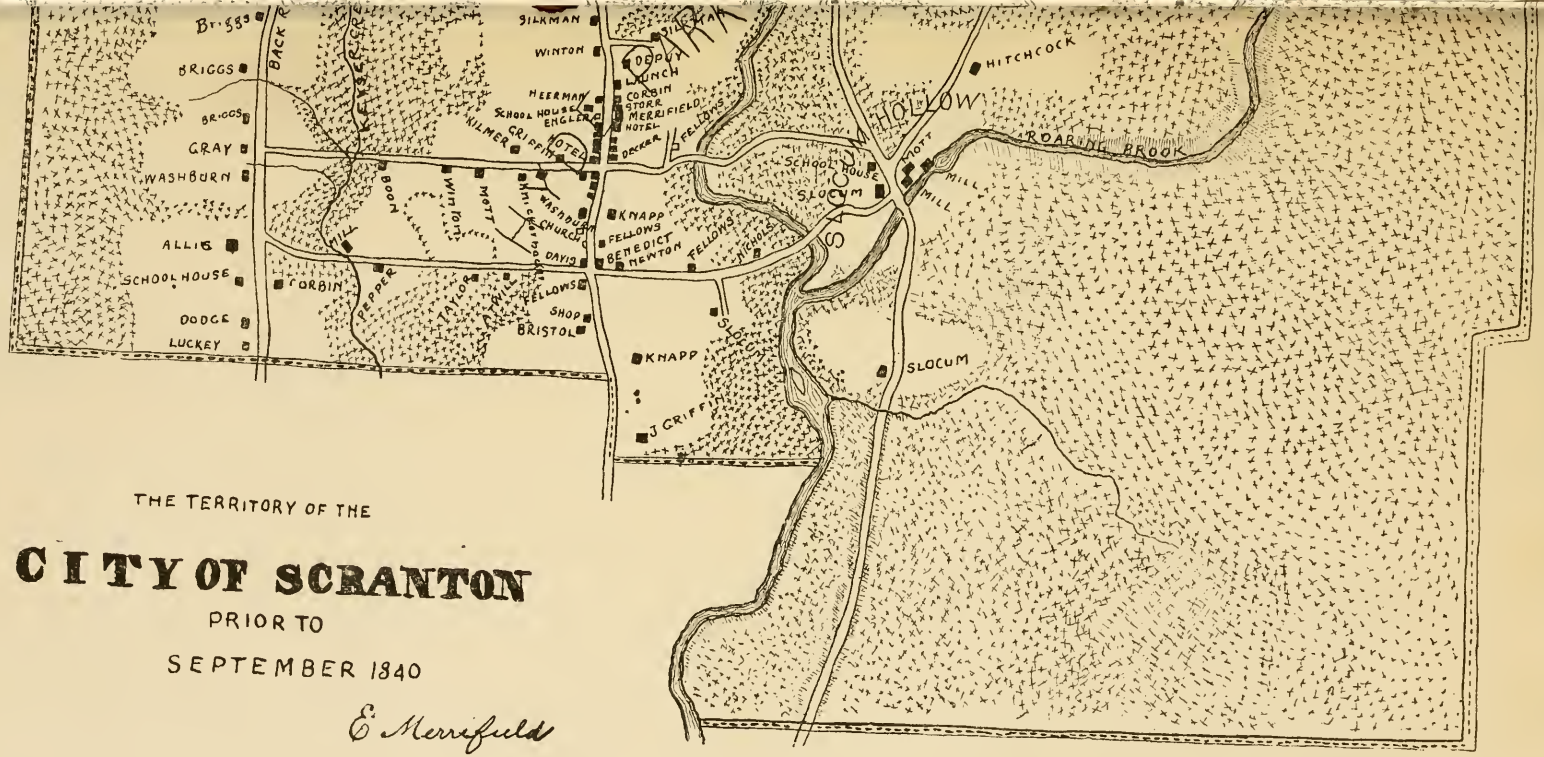

THE TERRITORY OF THE

CITY OF SCRANTON

PRIOR TO

SEPTEMBER 1840

E. Merrifield

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